

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

Claim 1. (Currently Amended) A method for excluding the entry of debris to the outer surface of the outer seal (17) of the sealing system of a shaft (18) passing through the hull of a maritime vessel to the exterior side thereof, in which method flushing water is introduced to the immediate vicinity of the outer seal from an internal water source of the vessel, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the flushing flow thus established from a annular member (1) surrounding the shaft (18) and the outer seal (17) is directed toward the shaft and is uniformly distributed about the periphery of the shaft and which flushing flow is established escaping via at least one opening (22) of the annular member exiting into the space between the propeller and the hull of the vessel so as to prevent debris carried by the outside water from reaching the outer surface of the outer seal of the propeller shaft.

Claim 2. (Currently Amended) A device of excluding the entry of debris to the outer surface of the outer seal (17) of the sealing system of a shaft passing through the hull of a maritime vessel to the exterior side thereof, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein said device comprises a annular member (1) surrounding the shaft (18) and the outer seal (17), said member including an internal flow distribution duct (25) and at least one opening (22) exiting from said distribution duct toward the periphery of said shaft for establishing a water flow escaping via the said opening exiting into the

space between the propeller and the hull of the vessel so as to prevent debris carried by the outside water from reaching the seal of the propeller shaft, means for distributing the said water flow substantially uniformly around the shaft, as well as means (2, 4, 5) for feeding flushing water into said internal flow distribution duct from an internal water source of the vessel.

Claim 3. (Currently Amended) The device of claim 2, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the device has a plurality of said exit openings (22) of different sizes.

Claim 4. (Currently Amended) The device of claim 2 ~~or 3, characterized in that~~ wherein said internal flow distribution duct (25) includes at least one constriction for establishing a uniformly distributed flushing water flow.

Claim 5. (New) The device of claim 3, wherein said internal flow distribution duct (25) includes at least one constriction for establishing a uniformly distributed flushing water flow.